



Hope of Tourism Recovery as Victoria Falls Hits Highest Occupancies Since the Onset of Covid-19

Victoria Falls Safari Lodge estate last month recorded its highest occupancies since the onset of Covid-19 in March 2020, with operators in Zimbabwe's top tourist destination optimistic of a recovery following the collapse of the industry.

Occupancy across Africa Albida Tourism's (AAT) Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, Victoria Falls Safari Club and Victoria Falls Safari Suites' 98 rooms reached 33 per cent in October, with some other hotels in Victoria Falls reporting similar occupancies.

This compares to average monthly occupancies across AAT's three properties being 16 per cent so far in 2021, while bookings for December are at 45 per cent so far, so looking set to exceed the October month average.

AAT chief executive Ross Kennedy said while November has historically been a softer month, December and the festive season were showing good signs of being the busiest month since the start of the pandemic with new enquiries and bookings still coming in daily.

"The forward booking pattern seems positive at this time and from the second quarter of 2022 onwards there appears to be real momentum building," Kennedy said.

"There are, however, many factors at play across all source markets and the world, so we take nothing for granted in an ever-changing extremely competitive environment," he said.

"We are seeing a trend of many more late bookings, with guests from local, regional and international markets, booking, paying and staying within one to three weeks."

Guests have also been staying longer in the last six months and that trend is also reflecting in bookings, with some international visitors staying or booking for five to seven nights, Kennedy added.

The increase in occupancies comes as 96 per cent of Victoria Falls Safari Lodge estate staff have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19, as well as 86 per cent of Victoria Falls' adult population.

In addition, access to Victoria Falls has been boosted with airlines flocking back to the destination. Airlines currently flying into Victoria Falls are Fastjet, Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways, British Airways (operated by Comair), Airlink, Air Zimbabwe and Mack Air, as well as charter airlines.

The Lufthansa Group's new leisure airline Eurowings Discover will start flying into Victoria Falls from March 30, 2022, increasing Frankfurt to Windhoek flights to a daily service, with a Windhoek-Victoria Falls-Windhoek tag flight three times a week.

Other international airlines to resume flights to Africa include Qantas with Johannesburg-Sydney flights three times a week from January 5, while Delta Airlines has also recommenced flights into Johannesburg from the US, and British Airways into Cape Town from London.

AAT operates a portfolio of properties in Victoria Falls, namely Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, Victoria Falls Safari Club, Victoria Falls Safari Suites, Lokuthula Lodges and The Boma – Dinner & Drum Show.

IMAGE CAPTION: Guests enjoying sundowners at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge's Buffalo Bar

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